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CDR Kenny Fent, PhD, CIH
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1090 Tusculum Ave
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RE: Support for the National Firefighter Registry (NFR) by the Firefighter Cancer Support Network

The Firefighter Cancer Support Network (FCSN) is in strong support of the National Firefighter Registry. Cancer is the leading cause of firefighter line of duty deaths. As an organization dedicated to the welfare of our nation's cancer-stricken firefighters who willingly risk their health and safety each day to protect communities throughout the country, we are keenly aware that firefighters are working jobs that make it far more likely that they suffer certain illnesses and injuries more often than other professions—particularly that of cancer.

In addition to the potential for significant injuries and death, firefighters must deal with heat stress, shift-work, sleep disruption and psychological stress, and exposure to toxic combustion byproducts. Several studies show that firefighters' have an increased risk of cancer. In 2022, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) completed their evaluation of the carcinogenicity of occupational exposure as a firefighter, which they have now classified as a group 1 *known human carcinogen*, based on sufficient evidence for cancer in firefighters for mesothelioma and bladder cancer. There was also limited evidence for several other cancers: colon, prostate, testicular, melanoma of the skin, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Per Jeff Burgess, M.D., M.S., M.P.H., Associate Dean for Research for the University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, FCSN Health and Wellness advisor and an IARC working group invited specialist, "The IARC designation that firefighting is carcinogenic is important. We need to use this determination to strengthen our efforts to prevent cancer in the fire service, continuing collaborative research to identify effective interventions."

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Still, more in-depth and comprehensive research is needed to better understand specific cancer risks and occupational risk factors among all types of firefighters, including volunteer firefighters, female and minority firefighters, and subspecialty groups of the fire service, like fire cause investigators, airport rescue firefighters, wildland firefighters, and fire instructors.

To better understand the link between firefighting and cancer, U.S. Congress directed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to create the National Firefighter Registry (NFR). The NFR is a voluntary registry of all U.S. firefighters, not just those with cancer. The project is being led by the CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), which has the knowledge, expertise, experience, and resources to lead this type of project. The NFR will be used to monitor and better understand cancer among firefighters in the U.S.

With broad participation, the NFR will be able to:

- Track cancer diagnoses (including rare types of cancer) among a diverse group of firefighters throughout the U.S.
- Explore cancer risk between different groups of firefighters, including women, minorities, and sub-specialties of the fire service
- Evaluate how exposures, including those from large or unusual incidents, relate to firefighters' cancer risk
- Evaluate how control interventions relate to firefighters' cancer risk
- Investigate whether firefighters' risks for different cancers are changing over time

Participation in the NFR is voluntary. However, it is the position of the Firefighter Cancer Support Network (FCSN) that all firefighters—structural and wildland, career and volunteer, active and retired, and those with and without cancer—should take part. The FCSN especially encourages firefighters all over the country to take time to enroll in the NFR. Having broad and diverse participation is absolutely critical to the success of the NFR.

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The FCSN is committed to the following in our effort to support the NFR registry:

- Advising our FCSN volunteers, mentors and mentees that the NFR is open to ALL firefighters and direct them to <https://NFR.cdc.gov>.
- Encouraging firefighters to register and reassure them that the information they provide is confidential and that they participate in follow-up questionnaires.
- Spreading the word, including retired or former firefighters, about the impact of the NFR.

By supporting the NFR, the FCSN hopes to learn more about the health risks firefighters' face. Information gleaned from this project will be useful to fire departments, fire service organizations, standard-setting organizations, and policy makers throughout the country and will ultimately help reduce cancer risk among firefighters.

Sincerely,

Bryan Frieders
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Firefighter Cancer Support Network

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